

*****REVISED*****

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Josephine County Road Use Permit for West Ash Gulch Timber Sale

EA# OR-117-04-10

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT
GRANTS PASS RESOURCE AREA

July 2005

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
MEDFORD DISTRICT

EA COVER SHEET

RESOURCE AREA: Grants Pass

EA Number OR-117-04-10

ACTION/TITLE: Josephine County Road Use Permit for West Ash Gulch Timber Sale

LOCATION: T34S, R7W, Section 20, Josephine Co., Oregon, Willamette Meridian

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Abbie Jossie
BLM District Office
3040 Biddle Road
Medford, Oregon 97504
(541) 618-2200

Interdisciplinary Team	Title	Resource Values Assigned	
Dave Allen*	ROW Specialist	Project Lead	
Stephanie Messerle*	Fisheries Biologist	Fisheries	
Dave Maurer*	Soil Scientist	Floodplains, Wetlands, Soils, Water	
Robin Snider*	Wildlife Biologist	Prime/Unique Lands, Wildlife, Grazing	
Russ Groves	Realty Specialist	Minerals and Lands	
Jeanne Klein	Recreation Planner	Recreation, Cultural, Visual Resources	
Linda Mazzu	Botanist	Special Status Plants	
Jim Roper	Lead Engineer	Roads	

*Core team members

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION	1
1.1 PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR THE ACTION.....	1
1.2 LOCATION AND LAND USE ALLOCATION OBJECTIVES	2
2.0 PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES.....	2
2.1 ALTERNATIVE 1: NO ACTION	2
2.2 ALTERNATIVE 2: PROPOSED ACTION.....	2
2.3 PROJECT DESIGN FEATURES.....	3
3.0 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES	3
3.1 SOILS AND HYDROLOGY	4
3.2 BOTANY	6
3.3 FISHERIES.....	8
3.4 WILDLIFE.....	10
3.5 VISUAL RESOURCES	14
4.0 AGENCIES AND PERSONS CONSULTED.....	14
4.1 PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND AGENCIES CONSULTED	14
4.2 AVAILABILITY OF DOCUMENT AND COMMENT PROCEDURES.....	14
APPENDIX A: MAPS	15
APPENDIX B: ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED FROM FURTHER ANALYSIS	17

1.0 Purpose of and Need for Action

This environmental assessment (EA) will assist in the decision making process by assessing the environmental and human affects resulting from implementing the proposed project or alternatives. This EA will also assist in determining if an environmental impact statement (EIS) needs to be prepared or if a finding of no significant impacts (FONSI) is appropriate.

This EA tiers to or is consistent with the following documents:

1. *Final EIS and ROD for the Medford District Resource Management Plan (RMP)* (June 1995)
2. *Final Supplemental EIS on Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (February 1994)
3. *Record of Decision for Amendments to Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* and its Attachment A entitled *Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late-Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl* (April 1994)
4. *Final Supplemental EIS* (November 2000) and *Record of Decision and Standards and Guidelines for Amendment to the Survey and Manage, Protection Buffer, and other Mitigation Measures Standards and Guidelines* (January 2001)
5. *Record of Decision* (March 2004) and the *Final Supplemental EIS to Remove or Modify the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measure Standards and Guidelines* (January 2004)
6. *Final Supplemental EIS* (October 2003) *Clarification of Language in the 1994 Record of Decision for the Northwest Forest Plan: Proposal to Amend Wording About the Aquatic Conservation Strategy and the Record of Decision Amending Resource Management Plans for Seven Bureau of Land Management Districts and Land and Resource Management Plans for Nineteen National Forests within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl. Decision to Clarify Provisions Relating to the Aquatic Conservation Strategy.* (March 2004)
7. *Medford District Integrated Weed Management Plan and Environmental Assessment*

The project also draws on the information and recommendations found in the 1995 Southwest Oregon Late-Successional Reserve Assessment (LSRA); the 2004 Late-Successional Reserve Assessment Amendment: Fish Hook / Galice LSR for an adjacent Known Owl Activity Center – Centennial; and the 1999 Rogue Recreation Section Watershed Analysis.

Planning and biological surveys for this project began prior to the March 2004 ROD (item 5 above) that changed the Survey and Manage program. The ROD (p. 8) allows such a project to be completed under the S&M standards and guidelines. This project is designed in accordance with these standards and guides.

1.1 Purpose of and Need for the Action

Josephine County has, pursuant to the May 1990 Memorandum of Understanding between Josephine County and the BLM, requested a Right-of-Way Permit (O&C road use permit) for: 1) hauling forest products using existing BLM roads and 2) constructing a road across BLM lands

to access their property. The Josephine County Department of Forestry seeks access to their land in Section 20 (T34S, R7W) which is surrounded by BLM administered land.

1.2 Location and Land Use Allocation Objectives

The roads proposed for forest products hauling are shown on Map 1 (Appendix A) hauling. The road construction is located in T34S, R7W, Section 20 (Map 2, Appendix A). It is located within the matrix land allocation and a managed late-successional reserve (the 100 acre Centennial Known Spotted Owl Activity Center (KSOAC)). Objectives for these land allocations are in the Northwest Forest Plan (NFP) and the Medford District RMP.

2.0 Proposed Action and Alternatives

2.1 Alternative 1: No Action

Under the no action alternative, the permit application would be denied. The proposed road on BLM land would not be constructed and Josephine County would be precluded from using certain existing BLM roads for forest products hauling.

The no action alternative serves as a baseline for evaluating the environmental effects of the action alternative. Inclusion of this alternative is done without regard to whether or not it is consistent with the Medford District RMP.

2.2 Alternative 2: Proposed Action

The proposed action is to grant the county's requested right-of-way permit as described below.

2.2.3 Road Construction

The new road construction would be approximately 2,425' long with a 14' wide subgrade and a maximum 35' wide clearing limit (Appendix A, Map 2). The road would have a natural surface and would be outsloped and drainage dipped. One culvert would be installed (See Map 2). This mid-slope road would have a maximum grade of 15%. The road would be barricaded after use at the junction with road 34-7-36. Within the right-of-way, approximately 150 conifers and hardwoods would be cut and removed.

2.2.4 Haul Roads and Road Maintenance

In addition to the new road, existing BLM roads would be used for log haul. Those roads would be maintained by BLM, including grading, brushing and ditch/culvert cleaning. The following BLM roads would be used to transport logs from county lands:

Table 1: (North) BLM Haul Roads		
Road No.	Surface Type	Length (miles)

34-7-2A,B	Aggregate	2.16
34-7-15.4	Aggregate	0.10
34-7-36K	Natural	0.51
35-7-11G-I	Aggregate	5.84

Table 2: (South) BLM Haul Roads		
Road No.	Surface Type	Length (miles)
34-7-15.4	Aggregate	0.10
34-7-36K	Natural	0.51
35-7-11A-D	Black Top	7.03
35-7-11E-F	Aggregate	1.79

2.3 Project Design Features

The following project design features (PDFs) would be included to reduce potential adverse environmental impacts from project implementation.

To reduce sedimentation, road construction and hauling activities on natural surface roads would not occur when roads are wet. Road construction and use would be limited to the period of May 15th through October 15th unless weather, road conditions or other PDFs dictate otherwise.

Slash resulting from clearing the right-of-way prior to construction would be windrowed on the down hill side of the road.

On BLM lands, tree felling and road construction that could disturb spotted owls during the critical nesting period, March 1 to June 30, would not be allowed. Disturbance is defined as noise above ambient levels within ¼ mile of an active nest site or activity center of known pairs and resident singles. This seasonal restriction may be waived if protocol surveys conducted prior to project implementation determine that the activity center is unoccupied or that the owls are not nesting or have failed in their nesting attempt.

Log haul would not occur between March 1 and June 30 if a spotted owl nest is located within 105' of the new road in section 20. This seasonal restriction may be waived if protocol surveys conducted prior to project implementation determine that the activity center is unoccupied or that the owls are not nesting or have failed in their nesting attempt.

Equipment would be washed prior to their initial entry into the project area to reduce noxious weed spread.

Protective measures including water bars, water dips, native grass seeding, and mulching of disturbed areas (cutbanks and fill slopes) prior to fall rains would be employed as needed to reduce sediment potential.

Headwalls and splash pads would be installed along with the new culvert on the new road.

3.0 Environmental Consequences

Only substantive site specific environmental changes that would result from implementing the proposed action alternative(s) are discussed here. If an ecological component is not discussed, it should be assumed that the resource specialists have considered effects to that component and found that the effects would have minimal or no effects. Unless addressed specifically, the following were found to be unaffected by the proposed action or alternatives: air quality, areas of critical environmental concern (ACECs), cultural and historical resources, Native American religious sites, recreation, prime or unique farmlands, floodplains, endangered, threatened or sensitive plant, animal or fish species, water quality, wetlands/riparian zones, wild and scenic rivers and wilderness areas. Port-Orford cedar does not occur in the project area.

Current conditions in the project area result from a multitude of natural events and human actions that have taken place over decades. Cumulative effects are defined as the, “impact on the environment which results from the incremental impact of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions” (40 CFR § 1508.7). A description of current conditions inherently includes the effects of past actions and serves as a more accurate and useful starting point for a cumulative effects analysis than by “adding up” the effects of individual past actions. “Generally, agencies can conduct an adequate cumulative effects analysis by focusing on the current aggregate effects of past actions without delving into the historical details of individual past actions.” (CEQ Memorandum *Guidance on the Consideration of Past Actions in Cumulative Effects Analysis* June 24, 2005.) Cataloguing past projects (other than the ones mentioned below) and their individual effects would not be useful in discerning the contribution of the incremental impact of the project’s action alternatives. However, cataloguing and analyzing other present and reasonably foreseeable actions relevant to the effects of the proposed action *is* necessary and is described below. By comparing the “no action” alternative (current condition) to the action alternatives, we can discern the cumulative impact resulting from adding the incremental impact of the proposed action to the current environmental conditions and trends.

Scoping for this project did not identify a need to exhaustively list individual past actions or analyze their environmental effects in order to fully analyze the effects, including cumulative, of this project’s action alternatives.

3.1 Soils and Hydrology

3.1.1 Affected Environment

The new road construction and county timber sale are located in the Rogue River/Lower Hellgate 6th field watershed within the 93,317 acre Rogue – Recreation 5th field watershed. The terrain is generally steep and dissected by small tributaries (such as Ash Gulch) to the Rogue River. Average annual precipitation is approximately 38”, mostly in the form of rain. Existing haul roads are in the Grave Creek and Rogue-Recreation 5th field watersheds.

Soils in the project area are Vermisa-Beekman complex, 60 to 100% slopes on north to northwest aspects. These soils are “extremely gravelly” and “gravelly”, respectively. Vermisa depth is 10-20” to fractured volcanic bedrock while Beekman is 20-40” to bedrock. This soil unit is very steep and is susceptible to raveling.

3.1.2 Alternative 1: No Action

Soils and streams conditions and trends would remain unchanged.

3.1.3 Alternative 2: Proposed Action

New Road Construction on BLM

The highly gravelly nature of the soils, their rapid infiltration and PDFs prohibiting wet season road construction and log hauling would limit surface erosion. Therefore, sediment production would be extremely slight to none. Fill slopes would be steeper than existing natural slopes. Given the soils' susceptibility to ravel, there may be sites on the fill slopes that would be subject to ravel, thereby making seedling establishment on the fill slopes difficult. The new road's outsloped, drainage dipped design combined with high infiltration soils should minimize concentrated, road-related overland water flow. Also, the windrowed slash below the fill slope would catch road-related sediment and ravel.

County Timber Harvest

The county proposes to log 133 acres (cable log 88 acres with at least one end suspension and tractor log 45 acres on ridge tops) in section 20 which would require 2.1 miles of new road on their land (pers.comm, Vic Harris). The new road would be low maintenance, natural surface, 14-16' wide, outsloped and water dipped. All state Department of Forestry requirements would be met. This would be a shelterwood harvest with less than 40% crown closure post-logging.

With an estimated 75% coverage of canopy, debris, litter, and duff, added raveling due to logging should be minimal. Local road density on county land would increase from 0 to 8.4 mi/mile². Due to reduced vegetation and increased road surface, there may be slight additions to local peak flows and stream yield. The estimated increase in compaction would be 9 acres. However, this would be on ridge tops so hydrologic effects would be minimal but there would likely be a slight reduction in soil productivity.

Road fill slopes would be steeper than existing natural slopes. Given the soils' susceptibility to ravel, there may be sites on the fill slopes that would be subject to ravel, thereby making seedling establishment on the fill slopes difficult.

Cumulative Effects

Road densities are estimated to be moderate (3-4 miles/miles²) in the 5th field watershed. It is low to moderate on BLM land and high on much of the non-BLM land due to past tractor logging on steep slopes, though there are no existing roads on the county land in section 20. The proposed road would increase road density by 1.8 miles/mile², bringing road density up to 5-7 miles/mile². Roads can concentrate seasonal surface water and shallow groundwater, routing the flow into the stream network. In this case, it would be drainage draws or tributary streams. However, this effect would be moderated because these are all outsloped roads with water dips encouraging infiltration into the soil before reaching streams. This effect would be unmeasurable at the 5th field watershed level.

Due to this combined action (road construction and timber harvest) it is highly unlikely that sediment would reach the Rogue River. There would also be no summer stream temperature

increases in the Rogue River. There would be a miniscule reduction in overall soil productivity due to compaction (tractor logging) and road development.

The majority of the haul roads (including the road with a Grave Creek crossing) are rocked which, combined with dry season haul limits, should result in no to minimal sediment reaching the stream network.

Past federal activities in the watershed that are relevant to cumulative effects for the West Ash Gulch proposal are the Rogue River pilot fuels project and the Stratton Hog, Maple Syrup, Cenoak, Shiney Queen and Pickett Snake projects. As with the proposal, each of these projects were also determined to have immeasurable or minimal hydrologic impacts at both the project level and the 5th field watershed scales. When aggregated and, in light of the fact that the combined timber sales involve less than 4% of the watershed, and the substantial dilution of any water quality or hydrologic changes from any of the projects, there would be no measurable or meaningful changes to the overall hydrologic or water conditions at the 5th field watershed level. Any impact that these projects might cumulatively have on water would be negligible and would certainly be within the normal, highly variable, range of natural conditions.

3.2 Botany

3.2.1 Affected Environment

The project area is in mixed evergreen forest at approximately 1,800-2,200' elevation. The project area is within the range of the federally listed *Fritillaria gentneri* (FRGE). Endangered and Bureau special status (BSS) plant species surveys were conducted in June 1997 and April, 2004. The second survey was needed due to changes in the list of species requiring surveys and relocation of the proposed road to approximately 100' below the location of the 1997 survey. No federally listed or BSS plants were found during either survey.

FRGE was included in the project's Biological Assessment. A Biological Opinion from USF&W was issued on June 10, 2004 which concluded:

*The Service concurs with the BLM determination that the proposed action with the project design criteria is a **may affect, not likely to adversely affect** determination for the Plant. There is no suitable plant habitat on the portion of the proposed project that is on BLM administered land. All suitable habitats on county land within the project area would be surveyed during the proper biological window prior to ground disturbing activities. The County has agreed to follow the PDCs and protection measures listed below if any Plant sites are discovered. Josephine County agreed to re-initiate consultation if they are not able to meet the PDCs and protection measures.*

Josephine County indicated that surveys were completed in the project area and no populations were discovered.

One species, *Lithophragma heterophyllum*, a Medford District tracking species, was discovered on two sites. This species does not require protection by policy. The new road would not disturb these populations.

No noxious weeds and very few non-native species were found in the project area.

3.2.2 Alternative 1: No Action

The existing vegetation would remain and continue on the same successional trajectory and the risk of weed and non-native plant invasion into this area would remain low.

3.2.3 Alternative 2: Proposed Action

No known BSS populations would be impacted by the proposal. However, tree removal in the right-of-way would create openings in the canopy and affect micro-climate conditions along the length of the road. Along the road, summer air and soil temperatures would increase and humidity would decrease due to canopy openings (Chen et al. 1993). As a result, over time, vegetation and habitat above and below the road would change and potential habitat for special status species requiring moister, cooler habitats would occur. The potential habitat would most likely be affected for *Cypripedium fasciculatum*. The known populations on Medford District (greater than 500) and range for this species would ensure that this project would not lead to the listing of this species. The global range of *Cypripedium fasciculatum* spans eight states in the western United States: Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and California. The northern range limit for *C. fasciculatum* is the northern Cascades of Washington. The southern range limit is the Santa Cruz Mountains of the central California coast. It occurs in mountainous areas from the coastal and interior far west to the interior-west and the mid Rocky Mountain Range (Vance 2005).

The potential of noxious and non-native weed invasion would increase along the length of the road as a result of temperature and humidity changes and canopy removal (Kimberling et al 2003, USDA Forest Service 2001). Fill slopes would be prone to establishment by non-native weeds and road traffic and heavy equipment could act as vectors for weed introduction and dispersal. PDFs that prevent weed spread (vehicle washing) would eliminate or greatly reduce the risk of project related weed infestations to the point where the risk would not be discernible from existing levels of weed establishment or spread.

Cumulative Effects

Past or ongoing activities on federal land in the Rogue Recreation 5th field watershed include the Rogue River Fuels Pilot project and the Stratton Hog, Maple Syrup, Cenoak, Shiney Queen and Pickett Snake landscape treatment projects. Only the Pickett Snake project included suitable habitat for *Fritillaria gentneri*, where five populations of the species were located. If populations are found during required surveys of suitable habitat in these other on-going projects, occurrences would be protected (USFWS Biological Opinion, 2004). Any new populations found could potentially fall within a *Fritillaria gentneri* recovery unit focused around the Pickett Snake and the nearby Red Mountain populations. These populations would receive additional protection as outlined in the *Fritillaria gentneri* recovery plan which could include habitat rehabilitation or population augmentation (USFWS 2003). Therefore, adverse cumulative effects to federal populations should not occur.

Given the species is listed as endangered by the state of Oregon, populations on state or county lands must be managed and protected. This includes those populations under the ownership of

the Oregon Department of Transportation, Southern Oregon University, Jackson and Josephine counties and the city of Jacksonville. Josephine County has indicated that they do not have timber harvest plans for other county lands in the Rogue Recreation watershed for at least three years. According to the Biological Opinion for this project (USFWS 2004), Josephine County is not planning to harvest land adjacent to the West Ash Gulch project for at least 5 years. It is reasonable to expect, though, that potential habitat would eventually be harvested. Given that protections should be in place as per state guidelines, cumulative effects to populations under these ownerships should not occur, but potential habitat could be reduced.

Reasonably foreseeable non-federal actions include timber harvest and associated ground disturbing activities. The West Ash Gulch timber sale would disturb habitat as described in Alternative 2, but at a larger scale than described for the road construction. The microsite changes discussed above would occur, which would encourage weed growth and reduce the chance for establishment of special status species requiring moister, cooler conditions.

Other reasonably foreseeable non-federal actions include development on private lands which could reduce or extirpate populations or potential habitat through ground disturbance, habitat removal and weed infestation (there are no laws governing rare plants, including federally listed plants, on non-federal lands). Potential habitat adjacent to federal land could also be developed and become an access point for OHV traffic.

In conclusion, *Fritillaria gentneri* and other special status species requiring moister, cooler conditions could be impacted due to timber harvest, land development, or related activities on non-federal land. However, the incremental addition of this project would not cause cumulative effects to existing populations of *Fritillaria gentneri* or other Bureau Sensitive species requiring moister habitats. Potential habitat could be reduced, but given the known number of populations and the size of range, it would not contribute to the need to list *Cypripedium fasciculatum*.

Citations:

Chen, J, J.F. Franklin, T.A. Spies. 1993. Contrasting microclimates among clearcut, edge, and interior of old growth Douglas-fir forest. *Agricultural and Forest Meteorology*, 63 (1993) 219-237.

Kimberling, D.N, Shanafelt, B.J., Parks, C.G., Knecht D.E., and DePuit, E.J. 2003. Forest Service land management actions as contributors to non-native plant invasions in Pacific Northwest forests and rangelands: a review: 38 pp.

USDA Forest Service. 2001. Guide to Noxious Weed Prevention Practices. Version 1.0.

Vance, N. 2005. Conservation Assessment for *Cypripedium fasciculatum*. USDA Forest Service, USDI BLM.

3.3 Fisheries

3.3.1 Affected Environment

The proposed road construction is above Ash Gulch, a non-fish bearing stream that drains into the Rogue River approximately 1.25 miles downstream. The Rogue River contains chinook, coho, steelhead, and cutthroat. The haul route would cross Grave Creek (a tributary to the Rogue River) which contains chinook, coho, steelhead, and cutthroat. The haul route would also cross two intermittent streams and 12 ephemeral draws. These streams flow into McKnabe Creek and Butte Creek, which are tributaries to Grave Creek. McKnabe Creek contains cutthroat trout, while Butte Creek contains coho, steelhead and cutthroat.

Factors limiting salmonid production in the Rogue Recreation 5th field watershed include 1) Inadequate stream flows in the summer months, 2) high water temperatures, 3) erosion/sedimentation to streams, 4) low levels of large woody material in the stream and riparian area, 5) lack of juvenile rearing and adult holding pools, 6) stream channelization in canyons and lowlands, and 7) migration corridor blockages (USDI 1999). Past management activities have substantially altered the timing and quantity of erosion and have changed stream channels, which have impacted fish production. Streams and riparian areas on federal lands appear to be in much better condition than streams on nonfederal lands. During low flow periods, water flows from federal lands and in some areas is totally withdrawn for irrigation, leaving the streambed dry (USDI 1999).

Timber harvest has had one of the biggest impacts on juvenile coho salmon, steelhead, and cutthroat trout habitat. In the past, large trees that grew next to the stream were harvested due to their valuable size, leaving few large trees available for large down wood recruitment for fish habitat. Habitat complexity rapidly declined, as did the coho, steelhead, and cutthroat populations dependent on the large wood (USDI 1999). The number of roads increased with timber harvest, many of which were constructed next to streams. This eliminated stream meander and multiple channels.

Alternative 1: No Action

Fish habitat condition trends in Ash Gulch, McKnabe Creek, Butte Creek, Grave Creek and the Rogue River would remain unchanged.

Alternative 2: Proposed Action

The proposed new road construction would be on a stable slope and would not cross any streams. One cross drain would be installed to meet BLM 100-year flood event specifications. Fish are located approximately 1.25 miles away in the Rogue River. It is unlikely sediment from the new road construction would reach the Rogue River due to the distance from the project, the PDFs that ensure dry conditions during construction, and a lack of a sediment delivery mechanism (there are no stream crossings associated with the new road construction).

The haul road would cross Grave Creek. However this stream crossing is an aggregate surfaced road and therefore is unlikely to deliver sediment to Grave Creek. Cutthroat in McKnabe Creek are located approximately 1.25 mile downstream from intermittent stream crossings and ephemeral draws on roads used as haul routes. Butte Creek contains cutthroat located 0.5 mile, steelhead 1.0-1.5 mile, and coho 1.6 mile from intermittent stream crossings and ephemeral draws on roads used as haul routes. It is unlikely sediment from hauling would reach fish habitat in the Rogue River, Grave Creek, McKnabe Creek or Butte Creek due to the PDFs for hauling in wet conditions, the majority of the haul routes are rocked roads, and the distance of the majority of the haul routes from fish bearing streams. The haul road with a Grave Creek stream crossing is an aggregate surfaced road and therefore is unlikely to deliver sediment to Grave Creek. The project would not affect the Fisheries Outstandingly Remarkable Value (ORV) in the Rogue River.

It is not anticipated that sediment from the haul routes and the new construction would reach coho or coho critical habitat. Therefore no effects to coho or coho critical habitat are

anticipated.

Future projects on private land include a Josephine County timber sale associated with the proposed road construction and haul routes. The West Ash Gulch Timber Sale has approximately 160 acres proposed for timber harvesting on Josephine County land. The timber sale is located near and around streams which flow into Ash Gulch, which feeds into the Rogue River. Because Ash Gulch is a non-fish bearing stream, the county's timber sale would not likely affect fish or fish habitat. It is highly unlikely effects such as sediment or stream temperature increases associated with the timber sale would affect fish or habitat in the Rogue River.

Planned or on-going activities in the Rogue Recreation 5th field watershed include the following: Rogue River Pilot Fuels Reduction and the Pickett Snake, Stratton Hog, Maple Syrup, Cenoak, and Shiney Queen Landscape management projects. Portions of these projects have already been completed. Streamside shade and coarse woody material on federal lands are expected to increase over time. Streams and riparian areas in federal ownership are in better condition than streams on private lands. This trend would likely continue.

Potential cumulative impacts of the proposed action to streams and riparian areas are negligible, due to the minimal to no effects of the proposed action. This assumes that timber harvest and new road construction on private land would continue to occur at no greater rate than the present.

3.4 Wildlife

3.4.1 Affected Environment

Threatened & Endangered Species

The proposed action is within the 100 acre Centennial KSOAC and is approximately ¼ mile from the nearest historic nest tree within this activity center (T34S, R7W, Sec. 17). The proposed road is also approximately ¾ mile from a second historic spotted owl site, Stratton-on-Ash (T34S, R7W, Sec. 20). These sites have been surveyed sporadically over the past decade. See Table 3 for survey history and results.

Table 3: Status of Adjacent Spotted Owl Sites		
Year	Stratton-on-Ash (#3387) Site first located in 1992; limited surveys through 1997	Centennial (#0970) Site first located in 1992; Annual surveys until 1991; limited surveys through 1997
1997	Not surveyed	Pair present-nested-2 young
1998	No owls detected	Pair present
1999	One survey- no detections	Not surveyed
2000	Not surveyed	Not surveyed
2001	Not surveyed	Pair present-nested-2 young
2002	Not surveyed	Not surveyed
2003	New pair-no young detected	Pair present
2004	No response	1 male, 2 females detected on 1 st visit

The project area is in a northern spotted owl critical habitat unit (CHU OR-65), which has

52,633 acres of suitable nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat (Rogue River/South Coast Biological Assessment 2003).

The nearest bald eagle nest is approximately two miles to the southwest. The project area is 1.25 miles from the Rogue River, which is the nearest eagle foraging habitat. Large trees suitable for nesting are in the project area, but distance to a large water source renders the area less suitable for nesting. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on the threatened bald eagle.

One year of marbled murrelet surveys were conducted in 1998. No murrelets were detected. In 2002, the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) rescinded the requirements for marbled murrelet surveys in zones C and D which includes this project area (*Technical Assistance on the Final Results of Landscape level Surveys for Marbled Murrelets in Southwest Oregon [FWS reference:1-7-02-TA-6401]*, USDI, 1-7-02-TA-6401, 2002).

There are no other threatened or endangered wildlife species known to be in the project area.

Survey and Manage and Special Status Species

Red tree vole (RTV) surveys were conducted within the proposed road route in February 2002 using methods outlined in the *Survey Protocol for the Red Tree Vole, version 2.0*. All identified nests were climbed; two active and two inactive RTV nests were found. There are approximately 300 acres of suitable RTV habitat on BLM land in section 20. Red tree vole surveys are not required on private or county lands and were not conducted. Red tree voles are typically associated with suitable spotted owl habitat. There are 32 acres of suitable nesting, roosting, and foraging spotted owl habitat, as well as 82 acres of dispersal habitat on Josephine County land proposed for harvest in Section 20. The 32 acres of NRF spotted owl habitat would also serve as the best RTV habitat on Josephine County lands.

Del Norte salamander surveys were conducted in the spring of 2001 along the proposed road route on BLM lands. Talus habitat and three Del Norte salamanders were found in a few locations along the proposed road. The segment of the road route, in which three Del Norte salamanders were located, was dropped and is no longer part of this proposed action. The Del Norte salamander was removed from the S&M list as part of the 2001 Annual Species Review.

Del Norte salamander surveys are not required on private or county lands and were not conducted. It is unknown if potential habitat (talus) exists on county land in the project area

3.4.2 Alternative 1: No Action

There would be no anticipated effects to T&E, S&M, or special status species. No habitat would be removed from BLM land.

3.4.3 Alternative 2: Proposed Action

Threatened & Endangered Species

Up to three acres of suitable NRF spotted owl habitat in the Centennial KSOAC and the designated spotted owl critical habitat unit (CHU #OR-65) would be degraded due to road construction. However, the proposed road would not substantially change the existing condition

of the current and future function of the KSOAC.

Approximately 150 conifer and hardwood trees within suitable NRF owl habitat would be removed for road construction. Consultation with the USFWS was conducted for the proposed action on BLM land and harvest activities on Josephine County land (Biological Opinion log # 1-15-04-F-0340). For the proposed action on BLM land, a *May Affect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect* (NLAA) determination for spotted owls was made due to the degradation of up to three acres of suitable NRF habitat. A *May Affect* (MA) determination was made on the designated spotted owl critical habitat. The USFWS concluded the proposed action is not likely to jeopardize the existence of the spotted owl and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat for the spotted owl. The degradation of these 3 acres of habitat would not preclude the function of this critical habitat unit (CHU # OR-65) to provide both sufficient habitat for clusters of breeding spotted owls as well as habitat for dispersing spotted owls across the landscape.

Noise disturbance to spotted owls is not expected because road construction activities would be conducted outside of the critical nesting period (March 1 to June 30). There are no anticipated effects to other listed T&E species.

For harvest activities on Josephine County land, a *May Affect, Likely to Adversely Affect* (LAA) determination for spotted owls was made due to the removal of NRF habitat. Approximately 160 acres is proposed for timber harvesting on their land. The County would harvest (remove) up to 32 acres of suitable spotted owl NRF habitat, and up to 82 acres of dispersal habitat. The County is proposing a shelterwood harvest in this section and canopy closure is expected to be less than 40% after harvest. The County would also harvest 46 acres that is not currently NRF habitat. The proposed road would extend approximately 2 miles onto county land in section 20. The West Ash Gulch BO states:

The Service anticipates that the loss of these 32 acres of NRF habitat from the tree harvest on County land could result in the disruption of these normal spotted owl behavioral patterns such as feeding, breeding, and shelter (BO p. 32). The timber harvest on the County land may adversely affect the two pairs of spotted owls on the adjacent BLM Matrix land. However, it will not jeopardize the species across its range or preclude spotted owls from dispersing across the landscape” (BO p. 34).

In summary, the road construction on BLM and the timber harvest on Josephine County lands “would not likely to jeopardize the existence of the spotted owl and is not likely to destroy or adversely modify designated critical habitat for the spotted owl” (BO p. 33, 34).

Survey and Manage and Special Status Species

Only bureau special status sensitive or assessment species are addressed in detail that have habitat within the project area and may be affected by the proposed action. If no habitat is present in the project area or the area is outside of the range of the species, then no further analysis is needed.

Effects to red tree voles on BLM land would be inconsequential. Out of approximately 300 acres of suitable RTV habitat on BLM land in Section 20, less than three acres (<1%) would be removed during road construction. Additionally, while the harvest on Josephine County land

would remove potential RTV habitat, there is sufficient habitat located within the adjacent BLM lands to maintain the local population.

The proposed route would remove approximately one acre of Del Norte salamander talus habitat. However, enough suitable habitat remains in the area to support the local Del Norte salamander population. Some snags and coarse wood would also be lost due to road construction which would affect species dependent on these late-successional habitat features. However, there are adequate amounts of snags and coarse wood within the stand, so the loss would be negligible. This alternative would also impact neotropical and ground nesting birds, due to loss of cover and nesting habitat. However, the effects would be negligible because approximately less than 5% of the habitat would be affected in the stand and project activities would occur outside the critical nesting period. Since surveys were not conducted on Josephine County land it is unknown if talus is present on their land. Therefore, effects from the timber sale on Josephine County land to Del Norte salamanders are unknown.

The proposed actions may disrupt some individuals of special status species and could cause habitat loss in some cases. However, the project is not expected to affect long term population viability of any species known to be in the area or lead to the need to list any sensitive species.

Cumulative Effects

The project area is in the 93,317 acre Rogue River/Recreation 5th field watershed. Approximately 37,678 acres of the watershed is under BLM ownership and of that, 19,216 acres are matrix, 13,564 acres are LSR, and 4,898 acres are congressionally reserved. There is approximately 4,229 acres of spotted owl NRF habitat on BLM lands in the watershed. Past management activities, including timber harvest and road construction on federal and private lands have led to the current habitat condition within this watershed. Past federal activities in the watershed that were relevant to the environmental baseline for the West Ash Gulch BO are the Rogue River Fuels pilot project and Stratton Hog, Maple Syrup, Cenoak, Shiney Queen, and Pickett Snake landscape management projects. According to the West Ash Gulch BO (p.29):

A portion of the 2002 Biscuit Fire occurred in the SW corner of this CHU; 1,642 acres of suitable habitat for spotted owl was lost. CHU #OR-65 currently has 52,633 acres of suitable nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat and is likely providing both sufficient habitat for clusters of breeding spotted owls as well as sufficient habitat to provide for dispersing spotted owls across the landscape.

The West Ash Gulch Project is approximately 10 miles northwest of the Biscuit fire. This 5th field watershed also includes the following ownership: 30,064 acres (U.S. Forest Service), 19,879 (Private), 4,436 acres (Josephine County), and 1,259 (State of Oregon). It is unknown how much of these lands are spotted owl NRF habitat or dispersal habitat. There are approximately 40 acres of spotted owl NRF habitat and 120 acres of spotted owl dispersal of habitat and non-habitat in areas of recent regeneration harvests within Josephine County lands within section 20. Josephine County has no current plans to harvest their adjacent lands in the near future (within 5 years), but it is assumed that the habitat would eventually be harvested. Most of the private land in the 6th field watershed is likely to be harvested or maintained in younger seral stages over the long term.

3.5 Visual Resources

3.5.1 Affected Environment

The area is VRM Class II. VRM Class II objectives are to retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract attention of the casual observer. The project area is not visible from either the Rogue River or from Galice Hellgate Backcountry Byway, due to foreground screening and topography.

3.5.2 Alternative 1: No Action and Alternative 2: Proposed Action

The effects would be the same for the no action alternative as well as for the proposed action alternative because the project area is not visible from either the Rogue River or from Galice Hellgate Backcountry Byway. The view of the characteristic landscape by the casual observer would not change, due to the fact that one cannot see the project area. The project would conform to VRM II objectives.

4.0 Agencies and Persons Consulted

4.1 Public Involvement and Agencies Consulted

Internal scoping for the project was conducted as part of the BLM's interdisciplinary planning process. Discussions were held with Josephine County Department of Forestry throughout the process. ESA consultation has been conducted with the USFWS.

4.2 Availability of Document and Comment Procedures

Copies of the EA will be available for public review in the BLM Medford District Office and online at www.or.blm.gov/Medford/planning. A formal 15 day public comment period will be held following an announcement in the Grants Pass Daily Courier.

Written comments should be addressed to Abbie Jossie, Field Manager, Grants Pass Resource Area, at 3040 Biddle Road, Medford, OR 97504. Emailed comments may be sent to or110mb@or.blm.gov.

Appendix A: Maps

Appendix B: Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Further Analysis

Helicopter Logging – An alternative to eliminate the need for road access to the sale area by using a helicopter for all yarding was considered by Josephine County. Under this alternative, the helicopter landing would be located between 720 and 1,520 feet above the sale area (adverse yarding) and between 1,500 and 4,500 feet horizontally from the sale area. According to the Forest Service publication, Logging Systems Guide, extra allowances should be considered for uphill yarding with greater than 1,000 feet in elevation change and for a flight path greater than 3,300 feet. Approximately 60% of the sale falls under one or both of these conditions. This alternative would be more expensive than the proposal and in order to offset the cost, Josephine County would need increase the harvest level. Therefore, this alternative was eliminated from further analysis by Josephine County.

Constructing an Access Road on BLM from the South – An alternative to construct the road from a saddle in Section 29 and traveling north to the harvest area was considered. However, this plan would require approximately a ¼ mile more road construction across BLM land and would cross six drainages. This alternative would also have a higher probability of reducing salamander habitat, as well as increased levels of disturbance to an adjacent spotted owl site. This alternative would also be more expensive to construct. Due to construction costs and potential resource impacts as compared to the proposed action, this alternative was eliminated from further analysis.

Constructing Access Road on BLM from the Southeast – An alternative to route the proposed access road from the ridgetop in the southeast portion of Section 20 directly to the harvest area was considered by BLM and Josephine County. Under this alternative, spotted owl and salamander habitat would be avoided. However, the terrain in this region is too steep for a direct route, would require an additional ½ mile of road construction on BLM land and would cross five drainages. Due to construction costs and potential resource impacts as compared to the proposed action, this alternative was eliminated from further analysis.